How to keep your child safe in an online world

February 2021 by Steven Dunwell

Keeping children safe from the potentially harmful side of the internet is a big and complex problem. Especially when smart devices (smart phones, tablets and computers) offer unmonitored access to everything from gambling sites, graphic content and cyberbullying as well as online scams and games with in-app payments (referred to as micro transactions) that children could accidentally run up huge bills.

However, if you're careful it's possible to keep your children away from the worst of the web.

Parental controls and monitor phone use

Parental controls allow you to determine what sites and apps your child can access with their smart devices. They also let you to set limits on how long a child can spend on their device and even allowing you to see how the use it. Parental controls can also limit online spending or stop them spending money at all.

Parental control apps

There are several great apps available that give you, as the parent, the controls you need to help keep your child safe and also make sure they don't run up a huge bill, here are three of the best:

Parental controls app	Price	Download link
Google Family Link	Free	https://families.google.com/familylink/
Norton Family Premier	£29.99 a year for unlimited devices	https://uk.norton.com/norton-family-premier
Qustodio	£32.36 for a five-device plan	https://www.qustodio.com/en/

Cyberbullying

Years ago, bullying would stop the minute the child left the school playground. But with the latest technology, children are always connected, which means cyberbullying can happen any time of the day or night and can also invade in the safety of the child's home. Due to its sometimes-pervasive nature, it can be even more psychologically scarring.

What is cyberbullying?

Basically put, it is bullying conducted online through chat rooms, social networks, emails, text messages, gaming platforms etc. Most of these are accessible from a smart device so possibly making any child vulnerable. It can take many forms, from the occasional critical comment to a sustained campaign of abusive messages, pictures and actions.

How can you tell if your child is being cyberbullied?

It may not be easy to spot, as just as with real-life bullying, the victims may feel too ashamed to talk about it. But there are some signs to look out for:

- Your child might want to avoid school or seeing their friends or may show an aversion to using their smart device.

- They may be nervous or edgy when they receive a text message, email or notification.

- They may be unhappy after using their device.

- They may become withdrawn generally.

Stay aware of your child's behaviour and be wary especially if it changes suddenly.

How can you keep your child safe online?

As this is a complex issue I would recommend visiting the website of "**Internet Matters.org"** which is a non-profit organisation that aims to empower parents and carers to keep children safe in the digital world, their superb website offers comprehensive information about cyberbullying as well as other online related safety matters, visit them at:

https://www.internetmatters.org/

How old does a child have to be to use social media?

Different social networks have different age requirements to open an account. One problem is that most of these platforms rely on the honesty of the person signing up – at the moment there's no system of age verification. So, if you don't mind your child being on a social network, it's important you help them set up their account to make sure they don't lie about their age, here is a general guidance:

Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter and Reddit require users to be at least 13 years old.

WhatsApp and Tumblr users in the European Economic Area (including the European Union) must be at least 16 years old. Outside of that, users must be 13 or older.

Stress the dangers of oversharing

When signing up to a social network, it's tempting to tick every box and share every detail about yourself. You may think you'll be getting a better experience but oversharing has its dangers. It could be used to gather personal information that could be used to steal your child's identity or guess their passwords etc. Have a chat with your child about the importance of privacy and what could happen if they share too much information about themselves.